

### **Major Jim Gray Comments**

For the most part, Westerners cannot comprehend what it is like in many of the countries where children are fighting as soldiers. What is normal in these countries is far from anything that is normal in the West. In these countries, governments have broken down and are unable to enforce law and order, provide basic services such as water and electricity, or operate schools. Armed gangs, militias, and armies roam the cities and control traffic throughout the countryside. The citizens, especially the children, are victims to the disorder.

Why do children fight? Many are alienated from their home environments because they were forced to commit atrocities and cannot return. Others don't want to go home because as soldiers they are well fed, clothed, housed, and are hooked on the power of being a soldier. Because of limited adult populations in the prime military age group 18-40, children are used extensively as soldiers.

How do children fight? They often are not organized in any way and fight in a disjointed manner. They don't understand anything tactical, and they are not a cohesive force. They are just kids, but kids on drugs with weapons, playing as if they are on a playground. When attacked, they fight fiercely. Their leaders lead by fear.

After the initial shock of facing children as soldiers, US and western forces must do their jobs. Major Gray urges that training prepare them for this shock.

Upon returning home, US and western forces may not be able to cope with normal life, and may go through a period of post-traumatic stress disorder. Many will be deeply affected by what they saw. US and western military leaders must prepare the forces for the kind of environment they will face before they deploy on operations. They also must go through the process of discussing and understanding what they were exposed to upon redeployment. Similar efforts will be needed with the family members of returning service members before they return.